01 20220427 Intro to Philippians – Paul discovers JOY!

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:1-2 NKJV)

Prayer

Philippians is one of my favorite books in the Bible. It is probably more quoted by me to this congregation than any other book in the Bible. You have heard me say many times, "*He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6)*, *"To live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21)*, and *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13)*. These are just a few. But there is also a beautiful portrait of the mind of Jesus Christ as a humble servant who *humbled Himself and became obedient to the cross*. (2:5–11).

It has been the book of the Bible that has taken me through the most difficult days of my life. It has sustained my joy in the most unhappy times of my life. On Sunday we listened intently to Pastor Broyhill as he gave a wonderful message on joy and joyful living. The pastor reminded us that happy living and joyful living are two completely different things. We learned that joy is not the absence of trouble but the presence of Jesus.

Happiness revolves around what happens. You may have heard the term happenstance which an online dictionary describes as: fate, fluke, chance, coincidence, hap, incident, event, luck, accident, fortuity and serendipity. That means circumstances that just happen. Hap is a word from the 1200's that means chance, fortune, luck or fate. Well, let me tell you, in the Book of Philippians Paul will tell us that our joy is not a matter of chance, fortune, luck, or fate. Our joy is a matter of Jesus.

Joy is a badge of divine ownership. It is the mark of a believer. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. A gloomy Christian is a Christian who is not walking in the Spirit. Nothing has hurt the Church and the cause of Christ more than the idea that believers are sour, dour, sullen, sad, angry, conflicted people. Nothing could be further from the truth of who we are in Christ. I remember as a little boy watching the priests at the Episcopal church where I went to school walking the halls in the black clothes. They looked more like undertakers than they did instruments of joy. That was just the viewpoint of a little boy. Nehemiah said, *"Don't be dejected and sad, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10)* When a believer goes through trials and difficulties, sometimes the only thing that can strengthen us is indeed the joy of the Lord.

Tonight, I want to look at how Paul first became acquainted with the people of Philippi. He first went there sometime between 49 and 51 AD. The Book of Philippians was written about twelve years later in 62 AD by Paul as he was sitting in a jail cell in Rome. This book is a thank you letter and a love letter written by Paul from a heart filled with joy to the Christians in

Philippi. Let's go back twelve years in time, so we can remember how Paul first met these people to whom he is writing. Please turn to Acts chapter 16.

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. [2] He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. [3] Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. [4] And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. [5] So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

The Macedonian Call

[6] Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. [7] After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. [8] So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. [9] And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [10] Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Lydia Baptized at Philippi

[11] Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. [13] And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. [14] Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. [15] And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So, she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas Imprisoned

[16] Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. [17] This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." [18] And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. [19] But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

[20] And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; [21] and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." [22] Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. [23] And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. [24] Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The Philippian Jailer Saved

[25] But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. [26] Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. [27] And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. [28] But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

[29] Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. [30] And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

[31] So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. [34] Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Paul Refuses to Depart Secretly

[35] And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."[36] So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." [37] But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

[38] And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. [39] Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. [40] So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

This is such an exciting account because we are seeing how the gospel, the good news, first came to the european people. For many of us, that is OUR people. This is the same Paul who had been named Saul, and he had been the early church's greatest nightmare. Before Paul met Jesus he was "Saul of Tarsus". He was a hard-nosed exacting legalistic Jew who was not fun to be around. He was self-righteous and knew how to look down on everybody. *"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: [5] circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; [6] concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Philippians 3:4b-6).* Paul was not fun to be around. He harshly persecuted the church. He wasn't joyful, he was filled with judgment. He was anything but joyful.

In Acts 9, Luke tells us about how hate-filled Saul was when he persecuted he early church. We read, *"Then Saul, still <u>breathing threats and murder against the disciples</u> of the Lord, went to the high priest [2] and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." (Acts 9:1-2).* Saul (later to be known as Paul) was on a seek and destroy mission of the earliest Christian Jews of the Church. Saul was BREATHING threats. We are told in Acts 8 *"[3] As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." (Acts 8:3)*

Saul was frightening. He was a terrorist. Think Taliban. But something got a hold of Saul and changed him. Something happened to him, and because of that, **something happened in him**. We know the story. On his way to Tarsus, he met Christ and he was changed forever. What happened to him was that a seed of joy was planted in his heart by the Holy Spirit. His heart of stone was being turned into a heart of flesh. And now, many years later after that dramatic conversion, that seed of joy had turned into a beautiful tree, planted by the river that gave forth its fruit in due season (Psalm 1:3). This is the same Paul who would write that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. He had learned the secret of being content in all circumstances. As he was placed once again under arrest, he didn't know exactly what was to come, but it didn't matter. He counted it all as joy. We read in Acts chapter 20.

[22] And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, [23] except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. [24] But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, <u>so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus</u>, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20)

Paul had changed so much. That seed of joy within him had grown so much from when it was first planted in him that he wrote the Church in Galatia saying, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. [24] And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5)*

In every negative circumstance, Paul was looking for how God was working. When life is happening unexpectedly, God is working supernaturally. Don't give up! It has been said NO SURRENDER, but I would say YES, DO SURRENDER. But surrender to the sovereign beautiful will of God for your life. When Saul of Tarsus surrendered to the Lord Jesus, He became Paul the Apostle. That means "Paul, the one sent by God". He was sent to preach to the gentiles, and that my friends includes YOU and ME.

God took the many tough circumstances that Paul encountered and He worked them together for good to make Paul the beautiful person that he was. And do you know what? God does the same thing with you and me. Paul would also write the little church in Rome, encouraging them. He would say to them, *"28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.(Romans 8:28)*

That is just one of the promises of God. I heard someone say over the last couple of days, that "we love the promises of God, but we don't like the conditions that go with them." This is a promise, but it requires that you love God and are called according to His purpose. So I'll ask you tonight, do you love Him? Are you truly called according to His purpose?

Let us pray.